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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 000426

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [IZ](#) [FR](#)

SUBJECT: GOF OFFICIALS ON BAGHDAD SECURITY CONCERNS, GOF
OFFER TO TRAIN IRAQI POLICE, IRAQI OCV IN FRANCE

REF: A. A) PARIS 299

[1](#)B. B) 04 PARIS 9098

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: MFA A/S-equivalent for Middle East/North Africa Jean-Francois Thibault stressed GoF security concerns regarding its personnel in Baghdad, during an introductory meeting with Pol/MC January 21. Noting that he had been instructed to raise the issue, Thibault asserted that increasingly stringent and arbitrary MNF-1 security measures at checkpoints at the Green Zone potentially endangered GoF personnel by keeping them waiting in cars for long periods at vulnerable intersections, and impeded French efforts to seek meetings with Iraqi officials, as well as at U.S. and EU missions located in the Green Zone. Thibault also cited an incident in which the French ambassador to Iraq was prevented from taking his car and security detail into the Green Zone to attend a meeting with a visiting senior U.S. official. Thibault urged better coordination between MNF-1 and diplomatic missions in Baghdad, to avoid compromising the security of diplomatic vehicles or impeding necessary access to the Green Zone. On other Iraq issues, Thibault waxed positive on the recent visit of IIG President Yawer to Paris and confirmed that a weeklong electoral training program for Iraqi political party representatives in Paris had given the GoF more optimism on potential cooperation among Iraqi politicians of varying backgrounds. Thibault confirmed press reports that the GoF was prepared in principle to train up to 1500 Iraqi gendarmes outside Iraq, but stressed that the scope and venue of the program would depend on the Iraqi response, which was still not forthcoming. Thibault also confirmed that registration for out-of-country voting (OCV) for Iraqis resident in France was underway, with one polling center in central Paris for the estimated 3,000 to 8,000 Iraqis residing in France. End summary.

DEMARCHES ON SECURITY CONCERNS

[1](#)2. (C) During an January 21 introductory call by Pol M/C, newly appointed MFA A/S-equivalent for Middle East/North Africa Jean-Francois Thibault opened discussion by noting that he had been asked to raise with us GoF concerns on security of its personnel in Baghdad, a demarche which French officials had also delivered in Washington and Baghdad. The GoF was increasingly concerned over increased difficulties for its diplomats in gaining access to the Green Zone, due to more complicated and seemingly arbitrary security measures employed by MNF-1 at Green Zone checkpoints. These security procedures, according to Thibault, had the effect of keeping French diplomats waiting for long periods in cars, at intersections known to be prime targets for car bombs; the French complaint was not with the wait, but with the vulnerability that this waiting created by keeping French diplomats waiting in vulnerable areas. A second concern for the GoF was that the potential such restrictions on Green Zone access had on impeding GoF access to officials from the Iraqi Interim Government (IIG), the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI), as well as U.S. and EU member state diplomatic missions. On the latter point, Thibault reported that meetings convened by the EU presidency in Baghdad took place in the Green Zone, giving the French ambassador in Baghdad another need for regular Green Zone access.

[1](#)3. (C) Citing specific incidents in particular, MFA Iraq desk officer Renaud Salins reported that French Ambassador to Iraq Bertrand Bajolet, en route to a meeting with visiting EUR A/S Jones in early January, had been required to wait for a long period at a Green Zone checkpoint and was told that his security detail and car could not accompany him in the Green Zone. As a result, Bajolet had to walk about 2 kilometers from the checkpoint to the meeting place at the Rashid Hotel; the French complaint was not that the ambassador had to walk, but that he was placed in a potentially vulnerable position and separated from his armed security detail for an extended period. In closing, Thibault expressed regret that he had to bring up a negative issue, and expressed hope that the USG could facilitate better coordination between MNF-1 and diplomatic missions in Baghdad, perhaps through clarification of new procedures or issuance of updated identification cards

which would be recognized by MNF-1 checkpoints throughout the city. In passing, he noted that the GoF had similar concerns over restrictions on access to the Baghdad airport road. He also made clear that the GoF did not believe that French officials were being singled out for any kind of special treatment.

YAWER VISIT, TRAINING OFFER

14. (C) Turning to more positive issues, Thibault described the January 12-15 visit of IIG President Ghazi al-Yawer (ref a) as a "rich and friendly" exchange of views, with "no taboos." Echoing comments to us from the Elysee (ref a), Thibault described Yawer as an impressive interlocutor with an excellent command of internal and regional issues. Asked for details on the French offer to train Iraqi police outside of Iraq, Thibault offered few specifics. He acknowledged press reports (sourced to Iraqi officials) that the GoF was prepared to train up to 1500 Iraqi police at a still undetermined venue, but stressed that there was "nothing new" about the French idea. The GoF had informed the IIG of the training offer some time ago, and Chirac used the occasion of the Yawer visit to remind the IIG of the idea, with more precision on what France could do. Thibault emphasized that it was still up to the Iraqi government to tell the GoF what it wanted; the training could take place in France, or in a country neighboring Iraq, or both. For instance, if the Iraqi government was more interested in training high-level police officers, training could take place largely in France at the St Astier gendarme academy. Thibault summed up that the Iraqi government appeared interested in the French police training offer, but to date had not responded or opted to send a delegation to Paris to discuss the issue further, as suggested by Chirac (ref a). The GoF presumed that an Iraqi government response would be forthcoming after the January 30 elections and formation of the new Iraqi Transitional Government (ITG).

15. (C) Thibault also described in upbeat terms the January 10-14 visit of 14 Iraqi political party representatives for a weeklong GoF-sponsored training session on the electoral and constitutional process (ref b). The Iraqi delegation was received by FM Barnier and Thibault, and met separately with representatives of the Socialist, Communist, and center-right UMP and UDF parties. The group also received a briefing on the French constitutional process from the officials at the "Council of State" (French Supreme Court-equivalent) and took part in an elections simulation organized by the Ministry of Interior. Thibault commented that the delegation -- which included representatives of all of Iraq's major parties (including Allawi's Iraqi National Accord) as well as two parties boycotting elections, the Iraqi Islamic Party and the Muslim Arab Socialist Party -- got along "remarkably well," which gave the GoF some renewed hope on the potential of Iraqi politicians to work together after elections.

16. (C) Thibault summed up that the GoF viewed Iraq's January 30 elections as a defining moment, in which credibility of the ballot was of paramount importance. The GoF remained worried over the prospects for voter participation and whether Iraq's Arab Sunni population would vote in large numbers. The GoF would continue to contribute as much as it could to support the elections, with GoF limits (in putting personnel on the ground in Iraq).

OUT OF COUNTRY VOTING ON TRACK

17. (C) Asked for an update on Iraqi OCV in France, Thibault confirmed that one OCV voting center, in the 13th arrondissement in Paris, would serve all of France's Iraqi voters. The voter registration process had started slowly, but was on track. Iraq desk officer Salins commented that it was difficult to estimate with precision the number of Iraqis in France, which is generally thought to range from 3,000 to 8,000; he commented that the GoF did not "know well" its Iraqi population and communities were generally divided on ethnic and sectarian lines, with Iraqi Kurds more affiliated with Kurds from neighboring countries. (Note: The Iraqi embassy DCM informed us separately that the central Paris voting center will also serve Iraqi voters coming from Spain and Switzerland, and that he had received complaints from Iraqis based in southern France over the requirement that all voters come in person to register, first, and later, to vote on January 30. End note.) Thibault affirmed that the GoF would provide ample security protection for the voting center, for which the location had been moved once to take security factors into account. He added that logistical planning for OCV with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) had been slow and somewhat of a headache, largely because IOM had no office in France.

BIO NOTE:

18. (C) Comment/Biographic Note: Thibault took up his new functions as French NEA A/S equivalent January 10, after serving since May 2003 as the Minister of Defense's Senior Advisor on International Cooperation and Arms Exports. His resume is not typical for attaining such a key position in the French diplomatic hierarchy; unlike most senior MFA officials, Thibault did not attend the elite "Ecole Nationale d'Administration" (ENA) and instead graduated from law school and the prestigious "Langues Orientale" institute (majoring in Arabic literature) before entering the diplomatic corps in 1973. After postings which included Rabat, Manama, and New York, he left the MFA for a five-year detail in the late 80's with ELF-Aquitaine. He later served as French Ambassador to the UAE from 1997 to 2001 and Ambassador to Mauritania from 2001 to 2003. Thibault opened his discussion with us by stressing his strong desire for regular and close cooperation with the USG, and he strikes us as a more open interlocutor than his predecessor, current French Ambassador to Lebanon Bernard Emie. Given Thibault's important position and stated readiness to build ties with U.S. officials, we believe it would be worthwhile for senior NEA officials, who may be en route to the region in coming months, to consider stopping in Paris to establish contact with Thibault.

19. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.
Leach